

EDGAR ALLAN POE'S

THE OBLONG BOX



SOME YEARS AGO, I ENGAGED PASSAGE FROM CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA TO THE SPRAWLING CITY OF NEW YORK!

THE VESSEL WAS A MULTI-MAILED PACKET SHIP BEARING THE PROUD NAME "INDEPENDENCE!"

WHILE MAKING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE TRIP, CAPTAIN HARDY, THE SHIP'S AGED PILOT, SHOWED ME THE PASSENGER LIST!

THERE WERE AN UNUSUAL NUMBER OF LADIES ABOARD!



AND AMONG OTHER NAMES, I REJOICED TO SEE THAT MR. CORNELIUS WYATT, A YOUNG ARTIST FOR WHOM I ENTERTAINED CLOSE FEELINGS OF FRIENDSHIP, WOULD BE REGIDING IN A CABIN NEXT TO MY VERY OWN!



I THEN OBSERVED THAT WYATT'S NAME WAS CARDED FOR THREE STATEROOMS! ONE CUBICAL WAS RESERVED FOR HIM AND HIS WIFE! THE SECOND WAS FOR HIS TWO SISTERS!

HMMM, THIS IS MOST PECULIAR!

AND THE THIRD ROOM PUZZLED AND PERPLEXED ME! THERE WAS, LOGICALLY, NO APPARENT NEED FOR IT!

THE AFFAIRS OF CORNELIUS WYATT WERE NO BUSINESS OF MINE, TO BE SURE! YET, I WAS BAFFLED. THE EXTRA CABIN REMAINED AN UNRESOLVED MYSTERY!

OH WELL, NO SENSE WORRYING ABOUT TRIFLES! I'M POSITIVE MY ARTISTIC FRIEND KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING

THE NEXT DAY, I LEFT MY HOTEL EARLY AND WALKED TO THE WHARF WHERE OLD CAPTAIN HARDY HAILED ME!

SORRY, SIR... BUT, OWING TO CIRCUMSTANCES, WE CAN'T SET SAIL TILL NIGHTFALL!

THIS I THOUGHT STRANGE FOR THERE WAS A STIFF SOUTHERLY BREEZE ... YET THE GOOD CAPTAIN WOULD NOT ELABORATE UPON THE DELAY FURTHER!

CURIOSER AND CURIOSER! THIS IS, INDEED, TURNING INTO A MYSTERIOUS VOYAGE!

EVENING LENGTHENED TO DUSK. I WAS PACING THE DECK RESTLESSLY, WHEN WYATT'S PARTY FINALLY ARRIVED!

IT'S ABOUT TIME! SAY, I WONDER IF MY ARTIST FRIEND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING US WAIT?

WYATT WAS IN, IT SEEMED, A CUSTOMARY FIT OF **DEPRESSION!** HE DID NOT EVEN **INTRODUCE** ME TO HIS WIFE... THIS **COURTESY DEVOLVING**, PER FORCE, UPON HIS **SISTER MARIAN!**



AND THIS KIND SIR, IS **MRS. WYATT!**

MRS. WYATT HAD BEEN CLOSELY **VEILED!** AND WHEN SHE RAISED HER VEIL, IN **ACKNOWLEDGMENT** OF MY BOW, I CONFESS THAT I WAS **PROFOUNDLY ASTONISHED!**

THE **TRUTH IS**, I COULD NOT **HELP** REGARDING MRS. WYATT AS A **DECIDEDLY PLAIN-LOOKING** WOMAN!



SHE'S NO **RAVISHING** BEAUTY! SHE'S A **COMMON HAG!!**

IF NOT **TOTALLY UGLY**, SHE WAS NOT, I THINK, **VERY FAR FROM IT!**

SHE MUST HAVE, NO DOUBT, **CAPTIVATED** MY FRIEND'S HEART BY THE **MORE ENDURING GRACES** OF THE **INTELLECT AND SOUL!**



SHE SAID **VERY FEW** WORDS TO **MR. CORNELIUS...** **ABSOLUTELY NOTHING.** THEN THEY BOTH, **ALONG WITH THE SISTERS,** PASSED AT ONCE INTO THEIR **RESPECTIVE STATEROOMS!**

JUST THEN, A **CART** ARRIVED AT THE WHARF WITH AN **OBLONG BOX!** I ASSUMED IT CONTAINED WYATT'S **EXTRA BAGGAGE!**

PERHAPS THAT'S WHY MY **FRIEND** REQUIRED A **THIRD CABIN!** THERE'S NO OTHER PLACE TO PUT THAT **WOODEN CRATE!**



THE BOX IN QUESTION WAS, AS I SAID, OBLONG. IT WAS **CONSTRUCTED** ROUGHLY IN THE SHAPE OF A **COFFIN!**

AS WORKMEN CARRIED THE HEAVY CRATE, IT OCCURED TO ME THAT WYATT MIGHT BE TRYING TO **SMUGGLE** A PAINTING ABOARD FOR SALE IN NEW YORK!

WHAT A **ECCENTRIC** ARTIST! **CORNELIUS** LIKES TO KEEP ALL HIS TRANSACTIONS A SECRET...

... BUT HE CAN'T FOOL ME!

ONE THING, HOWEVER, DIDN'T MAKE SENSE! THE **PINE BOX** DID NOT GO TO THE **THIRD** STATEROOM! IT WAS **DEPOSITED** IN WYATT'S **OWN!**

AND THERE, TOO, IT **REMAINED**, OCCUPYING VERY NEARLY THE **ENTIRE** FLOOR, WHICH MUST HAVE CAUSED EXCEEDING **DISCOMFORT** TO THE ARTIST AND HIS WIFE.

FOR THE FIRST THREE OR FOUR DAYS AFTER GETTING SAIL WE HAD **FINE** WEATHER, ALTHOUGH THE **SEAS** WERE, AT TIMES, A BIT **CHOPPY!**



WYATT'S **CONDUCT**, I OBSERVED, WAS **GLOOMY**, EVEN BEYOND HIS **USUAL** HABIT! IN FACT, HE WAS **COMPLETELY MOROSE!**



CAN'T GET OVER THE WAY **CORNELIUS** IS **ACTING**. ... AS IF HE WERE **GRIEF STRICKEN!**

THE TWO SISTERS **SECLUDED** THEMSELVES DURING THE GREATER PART OF THE PASSAGE, AND ABSOLUTELY **REFUSED**, ALTHOUGH I REPEATEDLY **URGED** THEM, TO **SOCIALIZE** WITH OTHERS!

WOULD EITHER OF YOU LADIES CARE TO **DINE** WITH ME?

NO THANK YOU, SIR! BOTH MY **SISTER** AND I ARE **CURRENTLY** FEELING A WEE BIT UNDER THE **WEATHER**!

PERHAPS SOME **OTHER** TIME!

MRS. WYATT HERSELF WAS **MORE** **AGREEABLE**! SHE **AMUSED** US ALL VERY MUCH!

WHAT AN **EMPTY-HEADED** FEMALE! WYATT WAS AN **UTTER** **FOOL** TO WED HER!

HA HA HA HA HA!

UNFORTUNATELY MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, THE **CROWD** **LAUGHED** **AT** HER INSTEAD OF **WITH** HER!

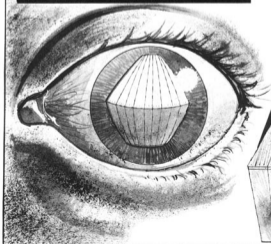
THE MEN SAID LITTLE OF HER... BUT THE LADIES WERE NOT AS KIND!

MRS. WYATT IS A **GOOD-NATURED** THING! UNFORTUNATELY, SHE IS RATHER **INDIFFERENT-LOOKING**, COMPLETELY **UNEDUCATED** AND DECIDEDLY **VULGAR**!

THE GREAT WONDER WAS THAT WYATT HAD BEEN **ENTRAPPED** BY SUCH A **WOMAN**! I COULD NOT ENVISION MY FRIEND **MARRYING** HER FOR LOVE NOR **MONEY**!

PLURP-P-P-P!

COULD IT BE THAT HE WAS TAKING **LEAVE** OF HIS **SENSES**? WHAT ELSE COULD I **POSSIBLY** THINK?



IN THE MEANTIME, IT WAS KNOWN BY ALL ON BOARD THAT WYATT AVOIDED HIS WIFE...SEEMED CONTENT TO BE LEFT ALONE BY HIMSELF!



CORNELIUS ALWAYS STAYS BEHIND... ALLOWING HIS WIFE FULL LIBERTY TO ROAM FREE AND UNSCORTED!

MY CONCLUSION, FROM WHAT I SAW AND HEARD, WAS THAT THE PAINTER, BY SOME UNACCOUNTABLE BREAK OF FATE, OR PERHAPS IN SOME SORT OF FANCIFUL FIT OF PASSION...

...HAD BEEN INDUCED TO UNITE WITH A PERSON ALTOGETHER BENEATH HIM... THE NATURAL RESULT... TOTAL AND SPEEDY DISGUST...HAD ENSUED!



I PITIED HIM FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART! BUT, I COULD NOT FORGIVE HIM FOR HIS STUBBORN SILENCE CONCERNING THE SECRET PAINTING HIDDEN INSIDE THE OBLONG BOX!

CORNELIUS HAS SIMPLY GOT TO LEARN TO TRUST HIS FRIENDS!

IF HE'D ONLY CONFIDE IN ME ABOUT THE TRUE CONTENTS OF THE CRATE, I COULD OFFER MUCH SOUND BUSINESS ADVICE IN RETURN!



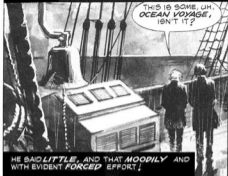
BECAUSE OF HIS DECEIT, I RESOLVED TO HAVE MY REVENGE. I NOW PLANNED TO TEASE WYATT UNBENDSILY WITH RESPECT TO HIS PRECIOUS SNAZZLED CANVAS!

LATER THAT SAME DAY, AFTER THE SUN HAD SET, HE CAME OUT UPON THE DECK, AND WALKING AT HIS SIDE...



... I SAUNTERED WITH HIM BACKWARD AND FORWARD!

HIS GLOOM SEEMED ENTIRELY UNABATED. BUT I CONSIDERED IT NATURAL UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. HE WAS MARRIED TO A CRONE!



HE SAID LITTLE, AND THAT MOODILY AND WITH EVIDENT FORCED EFFORT!

I VENTURED A JEST OR TWO TO CHEER MY SADDENED COMRADE... AND HE MADE A SICKENING ATTEMPT AT A WAIN SMILE IN REPLY!



NOT GETTING RESULTS BY THAT ATTEMPT TO LIGHTEN WYATT'S HUMOR, I INSTEAD DECIDED TO JOKE ABOUT THE CONCEALED PAINTING IN THE COFFIN-SHAPED CRATE!

HA, HA, HA! YOU CAN'T FOOL ME, YOU KNOW, CORNELIUS, YOU OLD DEVIL, YOU!

HUH--? W-WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU, UH, TAKING ABOUT?



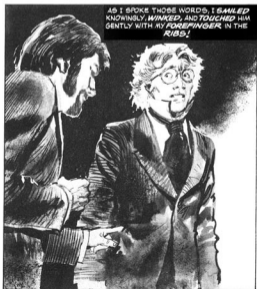
YOU KNOW VERY WELL WHAT I'M SPEAKING ABOUT! THE CONTENTS OF THAT DREADFUL PINE BOX IN YOUR CABIN IS NO LONGER A SECRET!

WHY, ALMOST THE WHOLE SHIP IS BUZZING WITH EXCITEMENT!

I-IT IS--?



AS I SPOKE THOSE WORDS, I SMILED KNOWINGLY, WINKED, AND TOUCHED HIM GENTLY WITH MY FOREFINGER IN THE RIBS!



THE MANNER, IN WHICH WYATT RECEIVED THIS HARMLESS PLEASANTRY CONVINCED ME, AT ONCE, THAT HE WAS MAD!



AT FIRST HE STARED AT ME AS IF HE FOUND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO COMPREHEND THE WITTICISM OF MY REMARK...



... BUT AS ITS POINT SEEMED SLOWLY TO MAKE ITS WAY INTO HIS BRAIN, HIS EYES, IN THE SAME PROPORTION, SEEMED TO PROTRUDE FROM THEIR SOCKETS!



HE GREW VERY RED... THEN, IN A MATTER OF SECONDS, HIDEOUSLY PALE!



SUDDENLY, AS IF HIGHLY AMUSED WITH WHAT I HAD INSINUATED, HE BEGAN A LOUD AND BOISTEROUS LAUGH, WHICH, TO MY ASTONISHMENT...



HA! HAH!
HA! HA-HA!
HA! NAH!

... HE KEPT UP, WITH GRADUALLY INCREASING VIGOR, FOR TEN MINUTES OR MORE!!



HAHAHAHAHAHAHA!

IN CONCLUSION, WYATT TURNED AND FELL FLAT UPON THE DECK WITH A MUFFLED THUD!

GOOD LORD!
I'VE NEVER
SEEN ANYTHING LIKE
THIS BEFORE IN MY
LIFE!



F-THUMP-P-P-P!

WHEN I RAN TO UPLIFT HIM, TO ALL OUTWARD APPEARANCES HE WAS DEAD!!

HE'S SO COLD... AND UNMOVING!



I CALLED FOR ASSISTANCE AND WITH MUCH DIFFICULTY, ANOTHER PASSENGER AND I CARRIED WYATT'S UNCONSCIOUS BODY TO HIS STATEROOM!

THAT'S HIS CABIN... NUMBER 12... STRAIGHT AHEAD! ONLY TWO DOORS DOWN!



UPON REVIVING, HE MUMBLED INCOHERENTLY FOR SOME TIME!

WE PUT HIM TO BED AND, AT LENGTH, HE DOZED OFF INTO A FITFUL SLUMBER! NEITHER OF US KNEW WHAT TO MAKE OF HIS ODD BEHAVIOR!



I AVOIDED THE ARTIST DURING THE REMAINDER OF THE JOURNEY ON THE ADVICE OF THE CAPTAIN, WHO SEEMED TO COINCIDE WITH ME ALTOGETHER IN MY VIEWS ON WYATT'S INSANITY!

I THINK YOU'RE CORRECT ABOUT MR. WYATT'S MADNESS, SIR, BUT PLEASE KEEP THIS TO YOURSELF! SO NO ONE PANICS!

WHY CERTAINLY, CAPTAIN HARDY! WHATEVER YOU THINK BEST!



TWO NIGHTS LATER, I FOUND I COULD NOT SLEEP! I GAZED ABSENTMINDLY OUT THE OPEN CABIN DOOR WHICH GAPED WIDE DUE TO THE SUMMER'S OPPRESSIVE HEAT!



I THEN HEARD CORNELIUS' DOOR SLAM SHUT NEXT TO MY OWN COMPARTMENT. OUT OF SIMPLE CURIOSITY, I GOT UP TO TAKE A LOOK!

MRS. WYATT HAD BEEN ALONE ON DECK, SHE NOW ENTERED THE EMPTY THIRD STATEROOM!

I ADMIRABLE THEIR SEPARATION SPELLED A LOOMING DIVORCE FOR THE ODDLY-MATCHED COUPLE!

I PICTURED HIM, WORKING FEVERISHLY, PRYING OFF THE NAILED-DOWN LID OF HIS OBLONG BOX!

IT WAS MY GUESS THAT SHE HAD BEEN DOING THIS EVERY NIGHT OF THE TRIP... SNEAKING OFF TO SLEEP BY HERSELF!

BAM!
BRAM!
BANG!



BANG!
BAM!
WHAM!
BAM!

SUDDENLY, MY TRAIN OF THOUGHT WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE BANGING SOUNDS OF A HAMMER AND CHISEL... FRENZIED POUNDINGS THAT FOUND THEIR ORIGIN IN WYATT'S ROOM NEXT DOOR!

A MOMENT OF DEAD SILENCE FOLLOWED...

... BROKEN BY A SUDDEN SHARP SOBING! CORNELIUS, I IMAGINED WEPT FOR JOY AT THE SIGHT OF HIS PAINTING!

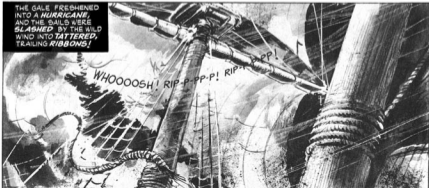


WE HAD BEEN AT SEA SEVEN DAYS, WE WERE OFF CAPE MATTERAS WHEN A TREMENDOUSLY HEAVY BLOW CAME UP FROM THE SOUTHWEST!

BATTEN DOWN THE HATCHES! AND HURRY... BEFORE WE'RE SWAMPED!

THE GALE FRESHENED INTO A HURRICANE, AND THE SAILS WERE SLASHED BY THE WILD WIND INTO TATTERED, TRAILING RIBBONS!

WHOOOSH! RIP-P-PP-P! RIP-P-PP-P!



THE VESSEL TOOK A TERRIFIC BATTERING, AND, AFTER MANY HOURS, BEGAN TO LEAK...



... AND THE CREW AND PASSENGERS TOOK TO THE LONG BOATS ... CASTING THEIR FATE TO THE GREY BEAS!



POOR CORNELIUS! HIS SPIRIT IS GONE! HE HAD TO BE LED AROUND LIKE A MAN IN A TRANCE!

MYSELF, THE GOOD CAPTAIN, WYATT, HIS WIFE AND THE TWO SISTERS ALL SHARED THE SAME LIFE-BOAT!

JUST THEN, THE ARTIST LEAPED UP... AS IF SUDDENLY PERCEIVING THE SITUATION... AND UNDERSTANDING IT FOR THE FIRST TIME!



CAPTAIN... CAPTAIN... STOP!!!

I MUST GO BACK FOR MY BOX! I MUST!

YOU'RE TALKING NONSENSE, MR. WYATT!

I'M AFRAID, AS YOU CAN EASILY SEE, THAT THERE ISN'T TIME TO GO BACK! SHE'LL BE GOING DOWN LIKE A ROCK IN A MINUTE!

MY DERANGED FRIEND COULD NOT TAKE NO FOR AN ANSWER! WITH A SUPERHUMAN EXERTION HE SPRANG OVER THE SIDE AND SWAM TO THE SINKING "INDEPENDENCE"!



AS OUR DISTANCE FROM THE WRECK INCREASED RAPIDLY, THE **MADMAN** (FOR AS SUCH COULD WE ONLY REGARD HIM) EMPLOYED FANTASTIC STRENGTH TO DRAG THE **OBLONG BOX** ACROSS THE DECK!

WHILE WE GAZED IN FEARFUL AWE, WHAT SWIFTLY PASSED SEVERAL TURNS OF **THREE-INCH ROPE** FIRST AROUND HIS **BOY** AND THEN AROUND HIS OWN **BODY**!

IN ANOTHER INSTANT BOTH **BODY** AND **BOY** WERE IN THE OCEAN....



...DISAPPEARING WITHOUT A TRACE, AT ONCE AND FOREVER!!

CAPTAIN! DID YOU OBSERVE HOW QUICKLY THEY SANK?

AYE! STRAIGHT DOWN TO THE **BOTTOM**... LIKE A **SHOT**! BUT, THEY'LL SOON RISE AGAIN... ONCE THE **SALT** **MELTS**!

FOR THE MOMENT, I DID NOT HAVE THE TIME TO QUESTION CAPTAIN HARDY FURTHER, ABOUT HIS CRYPTIC REPLY!



HOWEVER, AFTER SAFELY REACHING SHORE, I TOOK THE GRAY-HAIRED SAILOR TO ONE SIDE WHERE I ASKED HIM TO EXPLAIN WHAT HE HEANT ABOUT 'MELTING SALT'!


IF YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT MR. WYATT, SIR... I SUGGEST YOU THEN PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE GRIMMEST OF TALES!




"IT SEEMS MR. WYATT'S WIFE HAD RECENTLY DIED! HE WANTED TO BURY HER AT HER PARENTS' ESTATE UP NORTH!"

"SO AS NOT TO ALARM THE PASSENGERS (SOME OF WHICH WERE RELIGIOUSLY SUPERSTITIOUS) WYATT PACKED HIS WIFE'S EMBALMED BODY IN SALT..."

... AND HAD HER BROUGHT ABOARD THE SHIP IN A WOODEN PINE BOX!



"NOTHING WAS MENTIONED OF THE LADY'S RECENT DECEASE, AND WYATT ARRANGED FOR HIS HOMELY MAID TO POSE AS HIS WIFE!"



AND THERE, SIR, IS THE WHOLE STORY! THERE IS NOTHING MORE TO RELATE!

THE OBLONG BOY WAS EXACTLY WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE... A COFFIN!!

MY OWN MISTAKE IN RELATION TO THE CRATE AROSE NATURALLY ENOUGH FROM BEING TOO CARELESS, TOO THOUGHTLESS, AND, IN GENERAL, TOO INQUISITIVE!

BUT OF LATE, IT IS A RARE THING THAT I SLEEP SOUNDLY AT NIGHT!

UUU-UU-UU-NN-NHH! NOT AGAIN!! NOT AGAIN!!

THERE IS A COUNTENANCE THAT HAUNTS ME, TOSS AND TURN AS I WILL...

... AND THERE IS ALSO A HYSTERICAL LAUGH WHICH WILL FOREVER RING WITHIN MY TORMENTED EARS!!

HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!

